

Sun Safety

6/4/07

With temperatures predicted to climb near 90 this week, it is definitely time to get out the sunscreen, hats and sunglasses. Sun Safety Week runs June 3rd through 9th and reminds us of the importance of protecting our skin against the damaging rays of the sun.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC), the most common form of cancer in the United States is skin cancer. Experts believe exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays plays a large role in the development of skin cancer. In fact, most skin cancers are caused by unprotected sun exposure in childhood and adolescence, as 80% of a person's sun exposure occurs before age 21.

Unprotected skin can be damaged by the sun's UV rays in as little as 15 minutes. Yet it can take up to 12 hours for skin to show the full effects. So skin that looks "a little pink" today, may be burned by tomorrow morning.

The best way to prevent sun damage is to protect your skin with these tips from the CDC:

- **Seek shade**, especially during midday hours (10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.) when UV rays are strongest and do the most damage.
- **Cover up** with clothing to protect exposed skin.
- **Get a hat** with a wide brim to shade the face, head, ears, and neck.
- **Grab shades** that wrap around and block as close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays as possible.
- **Rub on sunscreen** with sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher, and both UVA and UVB protection.

Using sunscreen regularly on children can reduce their risk of skin cancer by almost 78%. Be sure to apply it at least 30 minutes before going outdoors, even when it's cloudy, and reapply it every 2 hours or after swimming.

While everyone is at risk for skin damage, some people with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop skin cancer, especially those with—

- lighter natural skin color,
- a family history of skin cancer,
- a personal history of skin cancer,
- exposure to the sun through work and play,
- a history of sunburns early in life,
- skin that burns, freckles, reddens easily, or becomes painful in the sun,
- blue or green eyes,
- blonde or red hair, or
- certain types and a large number of moles.

For more information about sun safety, contact the Springfield-Greene County Health Department at (417) 864-1658.